Strip Club AU

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Strip Club AU

by the_link_dock

Summary

Will is a broke college student who finds an ad in the window and goes for it without exactly knowing what he was signing up for.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

That Was Easy

Chapter Notes

updated as of august 17, 2020

Believe it or not, Will's life wasn't always like this. He hadn't *planned* to worked at a strip club owned by a possible crime lord.

But, then again, who did?

It started out as a bartender position, and meant to be temporary until Will had enough money saved to move to a nicer apartment and start paying off his student loans. As it were, he'd lost his last job as a waiter for being callous towards the customers and not having a "people-person" attitude. He was a week-and-a-half away from being evicted from his shithole apartment, and he couldn't afford to live on the streets with his dogs.

As luck would have it, he saw a help wanted sign in the window of what looking like a five-star restaurant. The windows were large and tinted dark enough that you couldn't peak inside. The windows were clean, as was the rest of the outside of the building. The concrete was a pristine grey and there were no smudges of dirt to be found.

Even the sidewalk was upkept; no weeds peeking through the cracks and no holes to be found.

Will would've never guessed it was a strip club.

When he walked in, he was taken aback by the assault of music pounding away loud enough for Will to feel in his chest. There was the smallest entry way to prevent people from peeking in and seeing the dancers straight away, but five steps in and to the right, there was a large stage with a pole centred towards the front.

There was an Asian female on the stage, spinning around the pole before gracefully kicking a leg straight up into the air and hoisting herself up to hang in the air with only a leg and hand on the pole to keep her steady.

It wasn't overly crowded. At least, not how Will would imagine strip clubs to be crowded. There were maybe twenty men that Will could see, and none of them were throwing money like Will had seen in movies.

Instead, they were placing stacks of money neatly on the edge of their tables and a woman came by and collected them, setting them on her tray as if they were dirty dishes that the men were done with.

Will swallowed thickly and hunched his shoulders. Stripping…wasn't his thing. People weren't his thing, that was why he got fired from his last job.

Another Asian woman approached him with a coy smile. She had on stringy bottoms that covered the bare minimum and what looked like a bikini top if bikini tops were made out of band-aids. It was revealing, and no doubt attractive to normal men, but it made Will feel uncomfortable in his three top layers of: t-shirt, button up, jacket.

Will jerked back and quickly apologised, "Sorry, um—I saw help was wanted? Is that—was that offer for girls only?"

He raised his voice after he started talking, but didn't lean in for her to hear better. Immediately after asking, Will wanted to take it back and clarify that he wasn't looking to be a stripper.

Her demeanour shifted from flirtatious to more relaxed before he could amend himself. He subtly glanced over her and noticed that with her heels, she was as taller than him, but without, she would probably only reach him nose.

He felt a flush warm his cheeks when he caught sight of her attire again, and was thankful for the dark lighting and flashing coloured lights. He didn't need her thinking that he was sexually aroused. Especially if he wanted to get a job here.

She must have told him to follow her because when Will snapped back to reality, her hand was holding his arm loosely and she was pulling him off towards a hallway that lead to a set of doors, each heavy duty and firmly shut.

He swallowed and his shoulders began to relax when the music became a dull thud and not an all-encompassing pounding in his skull.

She turned to face him while she unlocked a brown metal door. She had a funny smile on her face and looked him up and down with a raised eyebrow. "You sure you wanna work here?" She opened the door, and lead the two of them into an office.

Will flushed again and looked away as he debated with himself, "I don't know if I'm supposed to say this, but I *really* need a job. And I," he looked around the office and bit his lip, "didn't know this was a strip club." He muttered, feeling embarrassed that he *hadn't* known, as if there was some sort of indicator that he would've known.

She nodded in understanding and shut the door behind them, before laughing shortly, "That's kind of the whole point. We guarantee discretion and cater to a higher class that's more vulnerable to scandal and public back-lash."

There was a modest wooden desk with a black chair behind it and a cushioned chair in front of it. She walked around to sit behind the desk and extended a hand for Will to sit in front. She acted as though she were in a business suit, rather than the equivalent of lingerie, and Will respected it.

“I’m Beverly, one of the managers of the establishment. The boss won’t be here until later this evening, so I’ll conduct your interview.”

Will immediately became uncomfortably warm. “Oh, um, okay. Sorry, I thought I’d just fill out an application and wait for a call. I don’t exactly have a resume…Am I underdressed?”

She chuckled and tilted her chin down to level him with a dry stare, “I’m in a thong and a bra. You’re fine.”

Will flushed, “Sorry. Thanks.”

She leaned over and pulled some papers out of a drawer, “So, are you looking to become a stripper?”

Will bit his lip and fiddled with his fingers as he stared at the grain in the wood of the desk, “Um, no, I just saw the sign—like I said, I didn’t know what this place was.”

She nodded and looked down, shuffling through the stack she’d pulled out from the drawer. She didn’t look at him as she read off their openings. “We have a position for security but,” she gave him a once over and he hunched his shoulders.

It’s almost been a month since he lost his job, and even before then, he’d been notoriously bad at taking care of himself, so he wasn’t the most muscular man. He gave an uncomfortable smile in understanding.

She continued, “We also have a bartender position available. How old are you?”

“I turned twenty-one last month.” Will offered, cringey internally. He sounded so young and inexperienced.

She gave him a smile, “Okay, that’s good. We can start training you and get you started in no time.”

Will blinked, “What—that’s *it?*”

She laughed, “Pretty much. We get a lot of LGBT members here and you’re *such* a cutie.” She gave a leer and Will felt himself heat up from the inside out. His face was burning and he knew he looked like a tomato.

“Come in tomorrow at noon and I’ll teach you the basics.” That sounded like a dismissal, and Will didn’t want to screw this up, but he couldn’t help but ask what had been on his mind since he saw the fancy exterior.

Will bit the inside of his cheek, “Um, how much is the pay?” His voice was cautious and he almost didn’t want to ask, but he needed to know in case he needed to get a second job.

“We’ll start you out at twenty bucks an hour but you get to keep any tips you make.”

Will balked, “I don’t have to give you a percentage?”

At his last job, all the servers had to give the establishment a 20% cut off all tips they made.

She chuckled and shook her head, “Boss thinks it’s rude to take money you don’t earn.”

Will leaned back in his chair. *Wow*.

He stared blankly into space for a moment before leaning forward slightly, “Is there a dress code?”

She gave him a pointed look at her own outfit and he couldn’t fight the red staining his cheeks as he clarified, “Some places require wait-staff to wear slacks.”

She nodded in consideration, “Fair point. Not really, just dress nice. You can wear a crop top and booty shorts as long as they’re clean and they match. You can even wear ripped clothes, as long as it’s tasteful and not like you’ve been sleeping on the streets.”

He gave a weak laugh. “Right. So, I’ll see you tomorrow at noon?”

She nodded and shook his hand before escorting Will back to the front. Most of the men were in the same spots, though the dancer had changed.

Will went home relieved that he’d found a job that paid well, but with a new found anxiety that he would have to be sociable again. Beverly seemed nice and forgiving, but Will was dubious about how far her patience could last. He was a nuisance at best and downright troublesome at his worst.

He just didn’t do well with people. Hopefully the dancers would be enough to distract the patrons from conversation, and all Will would have to do was make drinks and laugh uncomfortably when the men made sexual comments about the dancers.

Will left his apartment at 10:30 after feeding his dogs and got the club at 11:30. As a broke college student in a fairly small city, Will didn’t have a car of his own. Normally, he would hail a taxi or call for an Uber, but due to the lack of income, Will didn’t have enough money to spare for a ride.

He sat outside for fifteen minutes until an old, but nice, car pulled into the parking spot in front of him. He could see it was Beverly though her windshield, and put his hands on his knees as if to stand up, but he remained sitting until she got out of the car.

Beverly pushed her door open with her leg and got out with a duffle bag that she slung over her shoulder. “New guy?”

Will pushed himself up and dusted off his pants, though they weren’t dirty. He was in dark jeans and a t-shirt with a flannel buttoned over it that was rolled at his elbows. Beverly had on sweatpants and a tight shirt with a jacket over it.

“My name’s Will,” Will offered, feeling stupid and wondering if he had given it to her yesterday at all.

She walked past him with a snort and unlocked the doors to the club, idly remarking, “You’re here early.”

Will paused in the doorway, “I can—wait outside.”

He was about to go sit backdown, but Beverly scoffed. “Don’t bother, just let me get everything up and running.”

“Can I—” Will stopped himself and looked down. He swallowed and tapped his fingers on his thigh, praying she hadn’t heard him.

“Can you...what?” Beverly’s tone was light and Will wondered how she was so calm with a stranger. She was a fairly small woman and Will was larger than her. If he were her, he wouldn’t want to be alone with a man.

Will was freaking out. “Can I... follow you? Sorry, that’s weird. And creepy. I’ll wait here.” He glanced around him, trying to stand still even though it was dark and he wasn’t alone.

Beverly clapped a hand to his shoulder, “Don’t worry about it, new guy. C’mon.”

Will wanted to protest the nickname, but he was too relieved that he wouldn’t have to wait alone. He wasn’t sociable, and he certainly wasn’t friendly, but Beverly was nice and Will liked having something to do to focus his mind.

He watched her turn on all of the lights and turn the AC on to 68.

“We turn it up at night so customers will buy drinks.” She explained, before turning back towards the main “lobby.”

Will nodded and followed her back to the bar. The lights were turned on from behind the bar, and it provided a sort of beacon out to the dimness of the rest of the room. It was well stocked and organised, though Will wasn’t sure how the bar was organised; if it was alphabetical, drink type, or what went together most. Either way it looked nice.

She showed him where everything was, explained what a jigger was and taught him the difference between liquor and liqueur. She also showed him how to mix some popular drinks, explaining that the Boss had purchased extra bottles specifically for training the new bartender.

She gave him tips on customers too. “Flirting helps. A *lot*. If you wanna make bank, you’ll need to smile and be a little more than friendly with the customers.”

He hunched his shoulders subconsciously and felt his stomach sink just a little bit. His smile was far from flirtatious. He’d even been told it was disconcerting and off-putting.

She looked him up and down again while he ducked his head and cleaned the glasses they had practiced with.

“Then again,” she murmured and Will glanced to her chin. “People will love your shy, nerd vibe.”

Will twitched and tried not to scowl, “I’m not a *nerd*.”

She snorted and he found himself grinning minimally. She was easy to joke with. She wasn’t offended when he didn’t snap at her, and she didn’t reprimand him for disagreeing with her.

Beverly was nice. She was straightforward and blunt. It was refreshing.

After his training, a total of four, she invited Will to the dancing room to watch her until the club opened at six.

He sat criss-crossed in front of a wall of mirrors, with his hands holding his feet, and watched Beverly launch herself at a pole and swing around it. Her feet were always pointed unless they were helping her grab the pole. Her fingers gripped the pole tightly to hold herself up, but her knuckles never turned white from squeezing to hard.

He watched her spin and do splits and hold herself with just her arms on the pole and found himself thoroughly impressed. It was incredible to see such grace and strength go together to flawlessly that it looked effortless.

Beverly dropped down panting and looked at him with bright eyes and sweat on her face.

He accidentally made eye contact and was assaulted with emotions.

Pride. A sense of accomplishment. Joy. Confusion? Slight offence, curiosity.

Will jerked his head down back down and picked at his jeans.

“You’re not hard.” Beverly spoke out.

Will flushed and pulled his knees up to his chest. “Sorry?” He offered, shifting his foot when he noticed it had fallen asleep.

She blew out a laugh and shook her head, “Don’t be. It’s odd to me for a guy to *not* get hard while watching, but it’s nice since we’ll be working together.”

His shoulders slumped in relief and he gave a tentative smile, but kept his eyes locked on her chin.

She walked him out of the training room as other girls began showing up.

“So, we all have stage names,” Beverly began, sitting on a stool at the bar while Will wiped everything down. They would be opening in twenty minutes.

“What’s yours?” He asked.

“Kitty,” she replied, shamelessly.

Will couldn’t hold back a snort, but he didn’t get the chance to regret it because Beverly merely grinned. “You’ll meet the other girls and they’ll either tell you their names or their stage names, and that’s not for me to decide.”

Will nodded in understanding, though privately he figured he would learn all of their stage names if he would be working here for a while.

This place seems too good to be true. It's clean. There's privacy. And security. And they don't take a percentage of his tips.

Beverly watched him wipe down the counter for the fourth time, "Do you want a fake name?"

Will jerked out of his thought and furrowed his eyebrows, "Like what?"

She was quiet as she stared at him before snapping her fingers, "Have you ever since Baby Driver?"

Will pursed his lips, "No?" Will rarely had a lot of free time, and even when he did, he wasn't the biggest movie fan. Either the actors were terrible and he could pick up on all of their "focus, get through this scene, act sad, be angry" or they were extremely good and Will could feel every "this is it, this is the end, I'll never see them again, there's no turning back" moment, which made it very hard to enjoy films.

Cartoons were okay, but a lot were catered to children and Will had passed that age where that type of humour was funny to him. Rick and Morty was okay, Bob's Burgers was funny.

She grinned, "You should be called Baby."

Will choked on his own spit and had a minor coughing fit before he was able to clear his throat enough to whisper-shout an, "Absolutely not!"

Beverly laughed, "Come on! You've even got the accent!"

Will flushed and turned away to put the glasses away. "I'm from Louisiana."

"Hey! Sweets!" Beverly called out.

A girl with dark hair came over. She was pale and pretty and had a square jaw. "What's up, Bev? Who's *this* cutie?" She looked Will up and down, and although it made Will feel uncomfortably sweaty, he wasn't put off by her.

Beverly grinned like a shark and proudly stated, "This is the new bartender."

Will swallowed as "Sweets" give him a once over with a critical eye. Then, she hummed in what Will picked up as approval and introduced herself, "I'm Alana, or Sweets. Sweets is my stage name."

Will smiled slightly and looked at the girl's neck, "I'm Will."

Her mouth dropped open and she turned her head to gape at Beverly, "A southern bell!?"

Beverly smirked and nodded, "I think he should be called, Baby."

Alana nodded without hesitation, “Oh, absolutely.”

“No! This is not becoming a thing!” Will protested with a sharp voice.

Alana ignored him and turned away. She ducked her head around until she stopped and spotted a girl with light brown hair and waved at her, “Babe! Have you met Baby!?” Her shout drew the attention of the girls in the lobby and drew them to the bar.

“I’m *not* Baby!” Will protested with red cheeks. He cringed when it sounded more like whining than an actual protest.

Alana *squealed*.

The brunette introduced herself as Margot and told Will that she and Alana were dating. And that he was Baby. By the time the club opened, he’d met all the dancers for the night and they’d taken to calling him Baby. Beverly briefly entertained the idea of calling Will “Farm Boy”, but decided Baby was cuter and “fit Will better.”

Will couldn’t say he agreed, but he certainly liked Baby more than Farm Boy. And, not that he’d admit it, a deep part of him liked feeling like something to be protected.

After a short while, a heavy-set man sat at the bar and Will gave a tense smile at him, staring at a button on the man’s shirt.

“Hello, what can I get for you?”

“A blue ridge punch, please.”

The man placed the money on the counter and Will gave him his change before he started making the drink.

The man left him five dollars and Will felt himself grin as he pocketed the cash. It wasn’t a lot by any means, but it meant he could have dinner tonight. Or—breakfast tomorrow, considering he wouldn’t get off until the next morning.

Most of the patrons were like the first man, curt but polite. They just wanted their drink and to watch the dancers. A few were more friendly.

“I don’t think I’ve seen you around before.” A tall man with cropped hair murmured, leaning against the bar.

Will focused on making a Bloody Mary while he answered. “It’s my first night.”

He gave the drink to a girl at the end of the bar and gave her a slight smile as he went back to the tall man.

“I’m Matthew.” The man introduced.

“Hi, Matthew. What can I get for you?”

“How ‘bout your name?”

Will bit the inside of his cheek before steeling himself and glanced at Matthew’s eyes.

He was intrigued. Aroused. He liked what he saw.

Will looked down with a slight smile.

“Maybe next time.”

As predicted, Matthew laughed and asked for an Appalachian Manhattan and gave Will a twenty-dollar tip. *Maybe the flirting thing* did *work. At least, when the patron in question has an attraction to you*.

Alana came to the bar with her arms around an older man, “Hey, Baby. Would you get us two shots of Vodka?”

Will’s eyebrow twitched in mock irritation, before he gave her a smile and nodded.

“Baby? Should I be jealous?” The older man asked.

Will looked at the man and felt relief when he saw the man was talking to Sweets, and that there was no possessiveness or jealousy. The man didn’t think he was Alana’s boyfriend, and wasn’t actually feeling threatened. He had paid for his time and was joking about it.

“No sir,” Will answered, regardless of if the question was aimed at him, as he poured the shots.

The man drank both while Alana whispered into his ear and led him away.

Will took care of other patrons and by morning, he’d made two hundred dollars in tips. More than he’d ever made at any other job he’d had.

Closing time was at five a.m. and Will was getting ready to take his trash out when he saw a well-dressed man with two trash bags held on the other side of him by his hands.

Will thought he might be the janitor, but the man was dressed in a three-piece suit. Will almost didn’t say anything, not wanting to disrupt this man who clearly knew what he was doing, but Will was already going to the trash and didn’t want the suit to get dirty.

“‘Scuse me!” Will called, rushing towards the man, who was much taller up close, Will realised. “I’ll take care of those.” Will reached for the bags, but stopped when the man spoke up.

“I can take care of it.” There was a distinct accent, though Will couldn’t place from where. The man was looking down at Will, but Will got the feeling that he wasn’t being looked down on.

Will grabbed the trash bags out of the man’s hands, regardless of what he said, and hefted one over his shoulder.

“Don’t worry about it, wouldn’t wanna ruin your suit.” Will looked at the man’s nose and gave a quick smile before he turned around.

He felt the man stare at him, but Will didn’t turn around as he went out the side door to the dumpster. He focused on walking normally and wondered if his legs were always so stilted or if he was just nervous.

When Will went back inside, he ran into Beverly. She was in the same sweatpants as before with a hoodie and her hair in a ponytail. Her face was bare and there were slight bags under her eyes.

“Hey, Beverly, are you...okay?” Will didn’t want to ask if she was sick (he had seen a lot of guys ask if girls were sick, when in reality they just hadn’t worn makeup), but she did look more worn out than earlier.

She gave a tired smile, “Hey, Baby. Boss has been stressed lately, and it’s making everyone a little more strung-up than usual. How was your first night?”

Will respected the change in subject, and told her how much he made in tips and she gave a laugh, “You’d make a lot more if you showed some skin.”

Will rolled his eyes and shook his head with a wry grin.

She showed him how to clock out and they walked out together.

She got into her car and rolled the window down calling out a, “Be safe, Baby!” as she peeled out and drove away.

Once she was out of sight, Will’s smile faded and he gave a quiet sigh. He shivered as the morning air breezes past him and knew it would only get worse as fall turned into winter. He held his arms across his chest and began his walk home, debating on if he was too tired to stop at McDosalnd’s.

Sugar

Chapter Summary

updated as of august 17, 2020

Chapter Notes

40 degrees in fahrenheit is roughly 4.4 degrees celsius

In the story, I don't mean 40 degrees celsius.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's apartment was small. There was no living room, as soon as you opened the front door there was the kitchen, which housed a small fridge that came with the apartment, and old oven with a gas-lit stove, and Will's bed, which was a twin and in the middle of the kitchen like an island.

Will didn't have dishes, he had a meagre set of silverware for when he ate takeout, but Will never cooked for himself, so the kitchen was mainly used for re-heating leftovers and a space for Will to sleep.

There was a short hall to the left that led to his bathroom and the bedroom he used for his dogs. The walls were dirty and decayed; the paint was cracked in some places and curled in others that showed the old wall paper still underneath it.

Will didn't have a TV, or any furniture aside from his bed and the number of dog beds in the bedroom. Will didn't have friends, so he didn't have to worry about company or if there was enough room for them or not.

It was an, admittedly, shitty place, but it was cheap. And it allowed dogs without a limit to number or size. That was the only point Will had been firm on. He *had* to be allowed to keep his dogs. If he didn't have his dogs then what was he even living for?

His front door didn't *actually* lock. The bolt was broken and the lock on the doorknob was jammed in the "unlocked" position. He'd debated on telling the landlord about it for a week, worried that the landlord might break in and steal Will's stuff if she knew it was unlocked, but then Will realised he didn't have anything worth stealing. He told her about it almost six months ago and has received no help or advice.

He used a wooden plank he found outside to block it when he was home, and when he wasn't, he relied on his dogs to defend their home. Truthfully, they weren't attack-dogs, but they were protective and defensive, and Queeny was a Doberman that smiled a lot, which looked like she was getting ready to bite your face off.

She scared off his last mailman, and was the reason he had to move apartments in the first place. She would get out of his first-floor apartment from the back door and would growl at the mailman, preventing Will from getting his bills. It was an ultimatum; the dog goes or they all go.

Queeny was the first one in his new apartment.

He was no longer on the first floor, but the second. The window above his sink in the kitchen was crack, and the bedroom window didn't open, but that was fine.

None of his windows had locks, but he wasn't overly concerned about that either. Being on the second floor with no balcony, it wasn't easy to reach his kitchen window, and his bedroom window was stuck shut.

Another reason Will wasn't overly concerned with robbers was his astounding lack of valuable things. His most expensive possessions would probably be his college text books and his laptop, though he rarely left his laptop in the apartment. He had an iPhone 5, but he rarely used it, and it was mainly in case he needed to call the police or if he didn't have his laptop and he needed to look up something about a stray dog he found.

Though, with how little he'd focused on college recently, he doubted he'd need his textbooks much longer. Will was struggling in many aspects of his life.

His diet was mostly the McDosalnd's dollar menu and ramen noodles that were ten cents a pack.

Soon, Will's new job would allow him to buy actual food, like Chinese takeout. God, what Will would give for a greasy platter of Beef Lo Mein.

Will schedule became working every night from 5:30 pm to 6–7 am, depending on how fast he was able to clean up his station and how long it took the custodian to take care of the rest of the club and for Beverly to lock up.

Will took online classes, so although he didn't have to worry about attendance, he had missed a lot of assignments during his desperate job hunting. His grades had been A's and B's before, but now they were D's and F's. Two of his classes had no late policy, so he could bring his grades back up with no worry, but the other ones weren't so lenient.

He'd likely have to send in an e-mail explaining his predicament, possibly with photo evidence that his life was shit and he wasn't just trying to buy extra time to slack off.

Said "free time" has been devoted to restless sleep and nightmares that have started making him sleep walk. Waking up at his front door had been surprisingly terrifying, and Will has

started considering buying some sort of BDSM-restraints just to keep him in bed throughout the night.

It was taking a toll on him physically, to be constantly up and moving at work, then getting up and walking around when his body was supposed to be resting. It made his legs ache and shake when he got dressed for work.

Was it sad that he had to ask for advice on his outfit from random thirteen-year-olds on Omegle? Absolutely, but he was the farthest thing from a fashion expert, so he got as many opinions as possible in a two-minute time constraint.

He stumbled across an older looking teen and she told him to wear skinny jeans. When he told her he didn't have any, she flatly told him to get some. It made him laugh for longer than he should've.

In the end, with her help, he wore his dark blue jeans and a long sleeve black t-shirt. Not very revealing, as Beverly had recommended, but it was form-fitting and was likely to get him some once-overs that would hopefully lead to some generous tips.

He walked to work with his hands in his pockets and his head down. He kept his mind blank by focusing on not walking on the lines in the side walk. He wanted to listen to music, but he didn't have headphones. He could probably get some after a couple weeks of working at the club, but he'd like to save up for a new apartment.

He saw a group of young adults wearing green bandanas and made sure to avoid eye contact as well as become as invisible as possible. When he passed the gang, he let out a silent breath and waited longer before he allowed his shoulders to relax.

There wasn't a huge problem with gangs, even though Will saw gang members a lot. There were hardly any territorial fights or shootouts, which Will was thankful for. That didn't mean he could be careless and overstep his boundaries, so he made sure to be cautious.

He got to work after Beverly, so the club was already unlocked and open for employees. After going in, he saw Chiyoh, a woman of very few words. Beverly told him that she'd worked for Boss longer than anyone else.

As Will went behind the bar and put on his apron, he thought about the Boss. He didn't know much about the mysterious figurehead. All anyone called the man was "Boss" or "The Boss." In fact, the only clear thing Will knew about the Boss was that it was a man. Will was told he'd been at the club multiple different times, but the younger man has never met him.

Regardless, he'd talked to the custodian every morning though. Will quickly realised that the man didn't need this job. Whether it was out of enjoyment or for something to do, the custodian came from old money and had no financial need that required he have such a low-positioned job as janitor.

Each morning, Will would take the trash from the man and the man would ask about his night. Their conversations were short in the beginning, with Will not really knowing how to hold a conversation and feeling too nervous to ask any questions back at the man.

Over time, it became less stilted and awkward, though the man never seemed annoyed with Will, even when the younger would answer with monosyllabic words. The custodian seemed nice and very patient.

The custodian was taller than Will, and wider too, though he certainly wasn't fat. He had light brown, borderline blond, hair and a noticeable accent. He was always dressed in a three-piece suit, which was often accessorised with an atrocious tie that never failed to make Will smile at the appalling lack of coordination.

Will didn't know the custodian's name. Originally, it was because they didn't have name tags, but now it had been a month since the two had started this morning ritual and it would be weird to ask. Will *couldn't* ask now.

Will greeted Alana brightly when she walked into the club and she gave a heavy sigh in response as she heaved herself onto a barstool.

"Hey, Baby." Her tone was tired and she rubbed her forehead after she rested her elbow on his bar.

"What's wrong, Alana?" Unless the club was open, Will called everyone but their actual names. Since no one has called him out on it, he figured it was fine.

"Margot's not doing so good right now. This time of year always puts her on edge so she probably won't be around for a couple weeks."

Will raised his eyebrows and frowned minutely, "Weeks? Is she okay? Are you two gonna be okay?"

Alana smiled at him like he'd done something well and it made him flush. He looked away, pretending to wipe down the bar. Again. She huffed out a laugh, "You're sweet, but we'll be fine. Boss helps us out extra this time of year. He makes sure we don't go under."

Will nodded at once. He'd heard a couple other girls talk about how the boss gave them extra because they couldn't afford rent or day-care. It seemed generous of the man, to be so giving to his employees. It made Will wonder what the Boss was really like and how he was so understanding for being the one in charge.

Alana left him shortly after that and left Will to his finishing touches before opening.

It was Thursday, so business was slower than Will wanted. There were a lot of gaps between customers, so Will watched the dancers with bored amazement. They were stunning as always, but working in a strip club for a month got old quick.

Will had never felt a strong physical attraction towards women, so watching the women pole dance was similar to watching a ballet. But if the ballet played on repeat for twelve hours every day.

He spent a lot of time standing around and re-cleaning glasses.

He was mentally preparing for a boring night of watching the girls dance—not that *they* were boring—when Matthew came back to the bar.

“Hey, sweetheart. How’s your night goin’?”

Will stamped down the flutter in his stomach—*it’s just a nickname, and it’s not specialised for you, calm down*—and gave a small smirk. “Still don’t have my name?”

Matthew slammed his hand on the counter in mock anger with a scowl that was twitching into a smile. “No, dammit! I’ll get it though, I swear it!”

Will tilted his head back with a laugh and scrunched his nose playfully as he rolled his eyes before leaning against the counter, “What can I get for you, *darlin*’?”

Will was being sarcastic, but his grin widened when he saw the tips of Matthew’s ears go dark red. Sweets has been right, he *was* a Southern Belle. Apparently, city boys loved country bumpkins like Will.

Matthew didn’t let it stop him for long though, and came back with a, “The usual for me, sugar.”

Will laughed as his face warmed. “I like that one, it’s cute!” And it was. “Sugar” was something Will could picture his dad calling his mom that, before she ran out on them. He called a lot of girl “sugar” after she left.

He set about making an Appalachian Manhattan while trying not to sweat under Matthew’s stare. Matthew watched him like a hawk when he was at the bar, and though Will always lost him in the dark and strobing lights, Will was positive he watched him like a hawk for far away too.

“It’s rude to stare, y’know.” Will muttered lightly.

Matthew tilted his head but didn’t look away, “Not every day you see an angel though.”

Will rolled his eyes with a snort and gave a wry smile, “Now, *that* was too cheesy.” Will handed Matthew his drink and gave a thin smile, “Better luck next time, tiger.”

Matthew gave an over-exaggerated sigh but took his drink without a fuss and paid with his customary twenty-dollar tip.

Will shook his head as he watched the skinny man saunter off and made a mental note to tell Matthew to stop tipping so much. It wasn’t going to get him laid.

The rest of the night was uneventful.

Less than sixty customers at the bar, though he did see quite a few by the stage, simply watching the girls dance.

Alana was closing that night and Will waited on her to walk her out to her car. It wasn’t that Alana needed the protection. Part of it was that Will *liked* having someone to talk to.

“So, is that lanky guy still flirting with you?” She asked, grabbing her bag from the changing room. She was still in her work clothes and Will turned around while she changed.

She’d told him that the bathrooms spooked her when the club was closed and she didn’t care if Will saw her naked. Regardless, he still turned around and tried not to blush too much. Whether he was attracted to women or not, he still felt embarrassed being surrounded by almost-naked women all night.

He worked at a strip club for god’s sake, he needed to get better at not being embarrassed.

Will cleared his throat and felt his face get hotter when his voice cracked, “Yeah, I find it cute in a funny, brother’s friend kind of way. I don’t think he’s serious, but it’s definitely entertaining. My favourite of the night was ‘sugar’.”

She gasped and he had to fight not to turn around. “You should’ve been called sugar!”

Will’s bottom lip jutted out and he risked turning around with wide eyes, “I’m not baby?”

She only had her pants on and he kept his eyes on her face. It was definitely worth her reaction. She gasped at him, “Oh my god, you are so adorable! Of *course,* you’re Baby!”

Will flushed and turned his head again, “I was just kidding, calm down.”

Alana huffed a laugh, “I’m not! I swear you could rob a bank with that face and they’d apologise for making you wait!”

Will openly laughed and felt his cheeks hurt from smiling so much, “I’ve never heard that one before!”

When he heard her zipping her bag, he turned around with his smile still in place.

She had on a baggy hoodie and lose sweats and Ugg boots. It was still cold out as winter came closer and he wished he had a warm coat. As it were, he’d left his at his apartment. It had been a lot warmer yesterday evening.

They walked out in comfortable silence until Alana hot to her car. “Where are you parked?” She asked, looking around the vacant parking lot.

Will wrapped one arm across his stomach to conserve heat and waved his free hand, “Oh, I don’t drive.”

She gaped again and turned her head to stare at him, “Baby, it’s *freezing!”*

Will shuddered as the wind passed. “Doesn’t change the fact I can’t afford a car.”

She frowned thoughtfully, “I’m sure Boss would help you out.”

Will scoffed with a wry smile and shook his head, “I’m not asking the boss for a raise or a car, I haven’t even met him, remember?”

She pursed her lips and shook her head, “That’s so weird to me, he’s here every weekend and most weeknights.”

Will shrugged, “Maybe you can point him out to me next time.”

She didn’t answer him but opened her car door hesitatingly, “Do you want a ride?” It was clear she was uncomfortable and didn’t really want him with her in her car alone.

Will shook his head and stepped back, “Now who’s the *sweetheart?* I’ll be fine, it’s not that far anyways. Go back to Dove and get some sleep.”

Dove was Margot. He felt uncomfortable saying their real names outside of the club where any creep could hear them. It felt like a violation.

She gave a quiet sigh, “Thanks, I really should get back to her. When she’s doing better, we’ll both give you a ride home.”

Will looked away as she got into her car, “Seriously, I’m fine.” He fought to keep his teeth from clattering and his body was beginning to hurt from being tensed so he wouldn’t start shaking from the cold.

She shut her door and rolled her window down and pointed at him, “Buy a jacket!”

He held his hands up in surrender and she glared at him a moment longer before cracking and giving a smile as she rolled up her window and drove away.

Will watched until she was out of side before he let himself shiver openly. It wasn’t even forty degrees outside and he had to walk.

He shuffled home, and when he got there, he had become numb to the cold and his fingers weren’t working properly. When he tried to grab for his doorknob, his fingers felt disconnected. He could see them curl around the knob, but he couldn’t feel anything below his forearm. It was disconcerting to see his finger bright red and trembling as he forced them to open his door.

It was a minor good thing that he didn’t have to use his keys, otherwise he would’ve been standing there for hours trying to get his hand to cooperate enough to get the right key, let alone unlock his door.

He didn’t take his shoes off when he got into his apartment. He kicked his apartment door closed before he flopped onto his bed and closed his eyes. He wiggled around enough to get under his covers and curl the edges under his arms.

He closed his eyes with a heavy but content sigh and distantly registered he should take off his shoes. He bent a leg to do just that, but fell asleep before he could toes off his shoes.

Chapter End Notes

check out my tumblr it’s pretty lit:
the-link-dock

:)

the Custodian

Chapter Summary

Will and the Custodian talk.

Chapter Notes

updated as of 19 august 2020

Will liked talking to the janitor. The man was highly intelligent and a good conversationalist for all that Will wasn't. When Will didn't know what to say, the man was good at taking control of the conversation without rambling or ranting.

Another nice thing was that the man didn't gossip, though they did talk about the girls and how the club was, the man didn't offer over personal information about anyone, nor did the man bring up any scandals that may have happened before Will began working with them almost two months ago.

Some nights, Alana and Beverly were too busy to wait for Will or told him not to wait for them. It was beginning to happen more frequently as Will became accustom to working at the club. There were mornings where the girls wanted to simply lock up and go home without Will hovering besides them like a lost puppy.

Will understood their need for space, and he respected it. However, when he knew he'd be walking out alone, he talked longer with the man he'd mentally dubbed as the Custodian. It seemed more respectable than "the Janitor." Though Will loved his dogs more than anything, he didn't like his tiny apartment, and liked spending as much time as possible out of it.

And since the weather had only gotten colder, Will wasn't eager to waste time on a slower walk than necessary. Though Will was getting paid enough to afford rent and decent meals, he wanted to save as much as possible for a better place to live. Possibly close to a dog park.

Possibly closer to the club.

Will was interrupted from his thoughts by the Custodian's voice next to him. "How is your night?" He asked, walking next to Will while they emptied all of the trash cans. They had a system worked out to where Will would heft the sacks more than half-way full out of the cans and wait on the Custodian to put a new liner in.

Will gave a small grin as he tied off the trash sack to make it easier to carry, “Same as usual. Loud music and loud patrons.”

The man gave a slight frown with his eyebrows pinched together in what Will could mistake for concern if he let himself get to friendly, “You should have ear plugs, or head phones.”

Will flushed uncomfortable and spoke quickly to try and hide his embarrassment, “I don’t have enough money for that stuff yet. I’ve got rent—and I have to buy dog food and pay for vet visits and Buster needs extra attention right now because he’s got *breathing* problems—he’s a boxer, but lots of dogs have breathing problems like pugs and pit bulls—”

Will cut himself off and glanced up to see the man staring at him with his mouth ticked upwards. Will ducked his head with a flush. “Sorry. I know that’s annoying.”

Will was well aware that no one cared about his dogs or which ones had breathing problems due to how they were bred. It wasn’t so much that people told him it was annoying, or that they specifically asked him to shut up, but Will was pretty good at reading people.

He could see that they were bored and uninterested in what he had to say. He watched them shift their feet and look around for some sort of an excuse to leave, and how they’d take a step back, only to give a forced smile and stay put when Will kept rambling about dogs.

Though the man hadn’t done any of that, past experience showed that no one liked Will talking too much.

The man pursed his lips and tilted his head, “I don’t find you annoying.”

Will offered him a hesitant smile and tried not to hunch his shoulders at the weight of the Custodians full attention. “You’re one of the few.”

“The girls are quite fond of you, *Baby*.” The man gave a teasing leer and Will scrunched his nose.

Will’s cheeks flushed and with a groan he whined, “Not you too!”

The man gave a soft chuckle and Will fought the urge to jut his bottom lip out in indignation so he didn’t seem like a baby. When they checked the bathrooms, Will wiped down the sinks and counters while the Custodian propped the door open and leaned against the doorframe with his arms crossed against his chest.

It was surprisingly intimidating, though the man himself wasn’t threatening or showing any hostile signs towards Will. He just had an imposing air about him that screamed self-superiority and predator that made Will subconsciously duck his head a little lower.

“You like it here though, yes?” The custodian asked, keeping his eyes locked on Will’s form.

Will nodded quickly, “Of course! This place is...It’s hard to believe it’s real. Everyone is so *nice* and the pay is great and I don’t want to kill myself thinking of work, y’know? I like it here.”

Will had his back turned to get the trash bag out and glanced over his shoulder to make sure the custodian hadn't left when silence followed. "What about you? How long have you been here?"

The custodian hummed thoughtfully and Will could picture his bottom lip pursing in thought. "As long as it's been open."

Will turned again to gape at him, "*Seriously?* I thought Chiyoh had been here the longest, y'know besides the boss. She's a really good dancer—all the girls are, I just mean I don't see Chiyoh practice, but she never messes up."

The man made a noise of acknowledgement, "Of course. The clientele expects nothing less."

Will rolled his eyes with a scoff, "I promise you; the 'clientele' couldn't care less if they were good or not. If they can see a girl get mostly naked, they'll take it." Will put the bathroom trash bag inside another trash bag that was already almost full to save space and the effort of holding multiple bags.

"And would you rather care about overall looks than techniques?" The man inquired, moving out of Will's way and leading them down the hall to the next bathroom. Will scrunched his nose in response as they went to the ladies' room.

"I don't know, I haven't really thought about it. I don't go to these types of clubs for *those* reasons. I wouldn't go to see talent either, being honest. But the way the girls dance is incredible and I can see that they enjoy it and how much work they put into it." Will sighed somewhat wistfully, "I wonder if they came here just *knowing* how to do it."

"How to dance?" The custodian asked.

Will hummed with a nod, "Yeah, I know it can't be easy but still. They make it look effortless."

They took care of the rest of the trash and then the custodian went with him to the dumpster. Will let himself shiver freely with his shoulders drawn up to his ears to try and protect them from the cold. Even with his winter jacket on it wasn't enough to actually conserve heat or keep Will warm. The most it did was deflect the chilliness of the wind.

Will laughed when the man hefted a load into the dumpster. "I don't see why you always wear a fancy suit if you're gonna deal with garbage."

The man gave a small smile and Will had to look away to hide his blush. The man was very attractive, in an intelligent, unconventional way. He was older and had laugh lines, though barely visible crow's feet on the skin around his deep-set eyes.

It made Will think that although the man smiled frequently, it was hardly genuine.

"Well, there's been a pesky bartender who's been doing my job so I haven't had to worry about it much." The man spoke, interrupting Will's staring.

Will bit his lip as he smiled in a self-deprecating way, “You should probably tell him to buzz off, then. I have a feeling he doesn’t understand subtlety.”

The custodian shook his head and followed Will back inside with a murmured, “No, he does not.”

That made Will genuinely laugh, and he covered his mouth with the back of his hand to stop from being too obnoxious. The two carried on with their routine until it was time for Will to clock out and go home. The custodian was usually the last one to leave, despite Beverly or Alana always being the ones to lock up.

He walked home feeling cold but light; content with his life for once.

Obviously, that couldn’t last.

Will was panicking. His apartment got broken into. *Of course, it did*.

He’d just gotten off his Friday night shift. When he reached his door, he saw it open and barely hanging onto its hinges. It creaked every time the wind blew into Will’s apartment.

He stepped inside with his heart in his throat and he felt like he could throw up. His stomach twisted every time something moved, though it turned out to be the wind blowing trash around.

When he got to the bedroom, his breathing stuttered. His dogs were hurt and bleeding and they weren’t running to greet him and Will didn’t have a car to take them to the vet and he didn’t see his laptop or his textbooks and his phone was about to die but his charger wasn’t there and his fridge was open and—

Will couldn’t breathe. He was panicking and his body wasn’t working properly so his breathing was quick and shallow and drained his energy rather than calmed him down. He pulled out his phone but it was shaking. Wait, it was his hand. His whole body was shaking with a swirling mess of anxieties.

He stood there with his phone unlocked. *Who could he possibly call? He couldn’t call the police; they might take away his dogs and he couldn’t afford the vet for seven dogs.*

“Wait here, I’ll get help,” Will told his dogs, feeling his throat constrict at the whines he received. He flitted in the hallway, briefly debating on leaving the bedroom door open, his dogs couldn’t exactly run away, before deciding to shut it to keep the winter air out.

He ran without thinking, ending up at the strip club and was relieved to see a black car still in the parking lot. Although, it wasn’t one he recognised, he was positive it was an employee of the club and therefore trustworthy. At least in this circumstance. He ran to the side door, but upon realising no one was there, ran back to the front doors and tried to open them, but found them locked.

Will felt hot tears rolling down his cheeks and could hear himself making pained noises every time he breathed. He banged on the doors, alternating with using his fists and flattening his hands to slap them against the glass, and jiggled the handles. “Hey! Please open up! I need help! Please!”

He pressed closer to the doors when he spoke and tilted his head up as if it would make hearing him easier. He rammed his shoulder into the glass a few times and felt his legs knock together as he looked out at the parking to make sure the car was still there.

Will felt himself begin to spiral. He’d left his front door open, his dogs were hurt, Queeny hadn’t moved, Buster was bleeding, Hunter didn’t lift his head, Winston—

Will kicked at the door and felt his chest start to heave as he sobbed openly, uncaring if he looked like an addict. *He couldn’t fucking breathe.*

He backed away from the door with his red and throbbing hands held out in front of him and tried to calm down. He tried to focus on his breathing but his dogs were *literally dying* and it was *all his fucking fault*. He stumbled to the ground and sat with his knees drawn and put his head in his hands as he gently rocked himself.

He heard the door open and looked up to see the custodian staring at him with wide eyes and a parted mouth. “Baby?”

Will gasped out and tried to say something but he couldn’t stop crying. “I—” he let out a sob and tried to suck in air but his lungs wouldn’t cooperate. With the help of the Custodian, Will got up off the ground, though he leaned against the man for stability and hunched forward.

The man took one of Will’s hands and put it against his chest so Will could feel the steady heartbeat. Then, he took deep breaths and told Will to copy them. Will couldn’t stop crying but eventually, he was able to *breathe*. Though tears still leaked down his face, he wasn’t sobbing every half-second.

“My dogs,” Will whispered unevenly, unable to say more without breaking down again.

The custodian walked Will over to the black car and put Will in the passenger seat of his car, going so far as to buckle Will in, and had the college student been paying attention he would’ve been mortified. The custodian told Will to tell him where his address was.

Instead, Will pointed at where to turn. Will rubbed his hands together as his leg bounced without stop for the duration of the drive. When they finally pulled into the parking lot, Will barely restrained himself from jumping out of the car before it was parked.

He struggled with the seatbelt, but was free of it soon enough. He kept glancing back to make sure the Custodian was following him as he half-hopped, half-ran to the stairs. Will darted up them and took comfort in the sound of steady footfalls behind him.

He stepped past his broken door and slowed down as he got closer to the bedroom door. He paused entirely when he reached it, partially waiting for the Custodian to catch up and partially unable to make himself open the damn door.

“Baby, your apartment was broken into,” the custodian said gently, but firmly. As if Will didn’t know that already and that it was his fault for not investing in a new lock now that he was actually being paid well.

Will gave a watery glared, “I know, but my dogs are what I care about—I don’t have a car, they can’t walk, I can’t take them to the vet—fuck, it’s seven am is the vet even open!? How am I going to pay for this—”

Will cut himself off by taking a deep breath on opening the bedroom door to reveal his sad pack to the Custodian. Will hadn’t realised his legs had given out until he was already falling to the floor and shuffling towards his dogs on his knees.

The Custodian gave him a few seconds until Will felt the man pick him up by the elbows. Will found himself unable to look away from his whimpering dogs, and his stare landed on Winston’s paw that was bent sideways. “’m gonna be sick,” Will mumbled before darting to the bathroom and falling to his knees for the second time in less than five minutes.

Will sat there for a moment without anything happening, then his eyes were twitching and he was hurling into the toilet. He grabbed the edges of the seat to brace himself as he threw up yesterday’s lunch.

He heard movement, distantly realising the man was shuffling around through his cabinets, but couldn’t look up for more than a second before he was whirling around and retching into the toilet again.

His eyes were wet and tired by the time he was able to stop and he flushed the toilet as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before standing up quickly, and swaying at the black dots in his vision. *He should probably drink water*.

He ran the sink and cupped his hands under the water before drinking several greedy gulps and splashing his face. He dipped his head down and drank straight from the faucet before he straightened up and swished the water in his mouth, then gurgled it and spat it into the sink.

He took a few breaths and wiped his hands across his face as if it would get rid of the blotchy redness on his cheeks and around his eyes, before he let out a heavy sigh and went back into the bed room. He stopped in his tracks when he saw the custodian kneeling by his dogs and bandaging them with Will’s first aid kit.

“What are you...?” Will couldn’t even finish his question in his bewilderment.

The man didn’t look up from patching up Greta, one of Will’s smaller dogs. “I was a surgeon for many years. I’m no veterinarian, but I know the basis of what to do.” He glanced up with a blank face, “You should sit down.”

Will let himself slide down the wall and sat with his legs straight out in front of him. He swallowed a few times before he managed to get his voice working. “I’m sorry for dragging you into this,” Will could hear how small and hollow his voice was.

“Never apologise for coming to me.” The man looked up to pierce Will with a heavy stare. His tone was far more serious than Will anticipated. (He had expected the man to huff a laugh or shrug it off.) Will blinked slowly and heavily.

“You’re tired.” The man remarked, finishing up with Greta.

Will stared at him without really seeing what the man was doing. “Yeah, I worked all night.” He cringed slightly at how rude he sounded, but didn’t take it back. He looked around the bedroom and felt his shoulders drop, “I don’t know if I could sleep here though.”

“Without locks?” The man guessed, checking over Buster and prodding the dog’s stomach and lightly pulling on the arms.

Will gave a wet laugh and shook his head, “My locks never worked. On my doors or windows, I used a wooden plank to block it. Now though, I don’t know if my door will even *shut*. What am I supposed to do?”

If Will were more conscious of himself he would’ve hated how weak and lost he sounded. He’d done just fine on his own. This was a minor—major—setback, but he would survive. He always did. Will stared at the wall opposite to him and frowned.

“I think you should stay with me for a few days. I have plenty of room for you and your dogs at my house.”

Wills’ eyebrows furrowed and his frown deepened. He didn’t want to be some charity case. “I don’t even know your name.” Will snapped, trying in vain not to sound too harsh.

“If that’s the only concern, it’s Hannibal.”

Will felt his legs tense and his hand twitch in response. It could be a decent human being showing concern, but Will was a bit more cautious now that he’d thrown up his hysteria and was thinking more clearly.

Yes, he’d worked with this man for months now, but how had Will only just learned his name? Will didn’t even know where Hannibal lived or what he did in his free time. It was stupid to go home with a stranger. And yet, Will felt himself nod because, *what else was he going to do?*

Will wasn’t sure how everyone fit in Hannibal’s Bentley—which, a Bentley? How had Will missed that? Much like the drive from the club, Will couldn’t remember the drive from his apartment to Hannibal’s house.

Will came back to himself when they pulled up Hannibal’s driveway. Will’s eyes darted to the man driving with slight concern. Hannibal hadn’t been joking, there was plenty of room for Will and his dogs. The house was huge and imposing. Possibly because it seemed more like a mansion than an actual house. *Old money*, Will thought bitterly.

Hannibal opened the back door for the dogs, and took the liberty of carrying Winston since the dog’s paw was still bleeding through the gauze that Hannibal had wrapped around it. Will

carried Greta because she was the smallest and one of the oldest. He looked up at Hannibal's house once more as the other man whistled for the other dogs to get out.

Will had a feeling they would be staying on the second floor.

Hannibal walked them up the steps and through the door into the entry way. Because Hannibal had an entryway. The floors were wood and there was a merged rustic-modern vibe to the style and décor of the house.

The walls were coloured darkly and the paintings on the walls were Victorian Gothic at best and downright morbid at worst. Will glanced around as Hannibal shut the front door and—yes, that is a collection of animal skulls on a floating shelf. *Delightful*.

Hannibal led him up the stairs, which was more of a grand staircase that a normal set of stairs. These were wood with a carpet placed neatly over them, leaving enough room to see the mahogany underneath. Will looked up to stare at Hannibal's back and thought, *I'll bet this was handpicked*.

Will had the feeling that Hannibal was much more meticulous—picky—than Will had originally thought. Will's eyes roamed over the walls and realised, without a doubt, that everything in the house had been picked for a reason and organised in some sort of intricate display that revealed nothing about the homeowner himself.

In all of the dark paintings and wall décor, Will hadn't spotted a single photograph that looked like it was personal to Hannibal. Will looked back to the ground when they reached the second-floor hallway and Hannibal escorted them to a spare bedroom, which was conveniently across the hall from Hannibal's bedroom.

"I'll be here, should you need anything." Hannibal offered, after depositing Will on the bed, somehow knowing that Will would prefer them on the bed with him, rather on the floor or in a separate room.

Will nodded dazedly. He couldn't tell if he was awake or having a strange dream. Had Hannibal really taken Will to his apartment? Was this a real place or a figment of Will's imagination? It seemed like five minutes ago, Will was clocking out of his shift and walking home, and yet…it felt like hours since he'd found his apartment broken into.

Will mechanically put all of his dogs on the bed and slunk into the middle of them after stripping down to his t-shirt and boxers. He fell asleep within seconds and was able to sleep through the day.

What's Up With Boss?

Chapter Notes

updated as of august 23, 2020 :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke up disoriented. There was a surrounding weight on the bed that Will wasn't use to. Will didn't often have sexual partners, least of all ones that would stay the night, and his dogs had their own room, so why—?

He cracked an eye open to find himself in an actual bedroom. *Oh, yeah*. He'd been fucking robbed and now he was staying with Hannibal, the custodian at the strip club he worked at. What the hell was his life coming to?

Now that Will had actually *slept* for…actually, he didn't know how long he'd been asleep for. Will tilted his head up to try and locate a clock, but found the room devoid of one. That seemed to be the only thing it was lacking.

Will saw a set of double doors on the wall adjacent to the exit of the room and would bet money that it was a walk-in closet. On the wall opposite to the double doors, there was *another* door that was left open and Will could just barely see the shiny tiled floor and pristine white towels, letting him know that, *yes*, this guest room had its own bathroom and it was nicer than Will's.

The room didn't have windows, though Will could see natural light coming from the bathroom and partially illuminating the left half of the room. The rest of it was lit up by a lamp on the dresser that Will forgot to turn off last night. The light was brighter than yellow, but not as clean as an LED light, and it gave the room a warm glow.

Will blew out a sigh and turned his head to squint at Buster, who was looking up at him with his head on his paws. Will pursed his lips irritably, "I knew this would happen. I should've bought stupid locks instead of stupid McDonalds that I didn't need anyways."

Winston whined and Will turned his head to coo at him while he scratched the dog's ears. His paw was still bent wrongly, but the bandage was clearer than last night. Hannibal must have changed them last night while Will was still out of it, or the man had done it this morning.

A shudder wracked his spine at the thought of Hannibal in his room while he slept. Even though, it was technically Hannibal's room, and it was for Winston's benefit. Realistically, it probably happened last night while Will was dissociating. It was still creepy to think about.

He took another look around the room and felt his eyebrows raise, "I didn't realise how big this place is." He looked down to find Queeny across the foot of the bed with her eyes closed

and her arms moving with her chest when she breathed. Will leaned his head back to look at Greta and she lifted her head in response.

Aside from the obvious, they seemed okay, if more tired than usual. And Winston whined every few minutes, but Will had expected it to be a lot worse. He was relieved they still trusted him; he'd had abused dogs in the past and it could take months before the dogs felt comfortable enough to relax in front of you. His dogs hadn't been abused exactly, but they'd been hurt badly, and it was enough to warrant a bit of mistrust for humans.

Will gave two solid pats to Buster's stomach, careful not to be too harsh in case of any unsees injuries, before rubbing it softly. Will felt his stomach clench in hunger and tried to recall when he last ate. Then, he remembered he threw up last night and was due for a meal.

Will stared at his dogs blankly before jumping out of bed in panic and running to the door, much to the alarm of the still sleepy dogs on the bed, "Oh my god, I didn't get your food!"

He barged in on Hannibal's room and found the bed made and the man absent.

Will turned and ran down the stairs, taking two at a time with his hand out and barely skimming the rail. He powerwalked down the hall, not wanting to slow down, but also not sure where Hannibal was.

He ended up finding Hannibal after spying a swinging door and rightly assuming it led to the kitchen. He rested an arm on the door frame as he panted to catch his breath and he rested his other hand on his hip.

He had to take several deep breaths before he could talk, and in that time, Hannibal had turned around from where he was cooking. He offered with a small, but bright, smile before he turned around to resume cooking. "Good morning, Baby."

Hannibal's lower half was covered by a counter, but the top half showed Hannibal dressed well, even in his own home. He had on a burgundy sweater that looked expensive. Will wasn't entirely sure what Cashmere was, but he did know it was expensive and high quality. Hannibal seemed like the type to own a cashmere sweater. Tied around his waist was a white apron.

Will flushed at his alias, even though he'd been called that for almost a month, and gave his head a light shake, as if it would clear his thoughts. He refocused on Hannibal and let his eyes wide in horror. "I forgot to get dog food!"

Hannibal cracked an egg and opened it over a pan, "That's what troubles you? Not to worry, what I'm cooking for breakfast is healthy for dogs too. There's enough to share."

Will stared at the man's back in shock. "It's breakfast?" Will asked dumbly. He moved his head to the side and saw that there was a window behind Hannibal and, yes, it was morning. *Huh*.

Will shifted awkwardly and fiddled with the hem of his t-shirt. Will bit the inside of his cheek and looked around the kitchen. There was an extraordinarily large stainless-steel fridge that

gave Will the impression that, not only did Hannibal like to cook, but he was almost certainly good at it as well.

Will looked down and his eyes widened in horror, “Oh my god, I’m in my boxers.”

Hannibal hummed but kept his attention on the food, “I like the look.”

Will gaped at the man as his face darkened. *Did he just…make a joke?* Will couldn’t discern if the man was being serious or teasing; Hannibal had made the comment in passing without inflexion, and without looking at Will, so the college student to had nothing to read into to help him figure it out.

Will stood frozen and silent for a minute until he settled on, “I’ll just...get the dogs.” He backed out of the kitchen, keeping his eyes trained on Hannibal and letting the door swing shut slowly after him. Will held the door to ensure it didn’t swing open the other way and reveal himself having a mild freak out.

As soon as Will was safe from scrutiny, he turned on his heels and ran upstairs on his tiptoes, as if it would lessen the thumps of his feet on the ground and the steps. He stayed tense until he was in the safety of his guest room, and once he got there, he shut the door behind him.

“Oh my god, what is *wrong* with me!?” Will rubbed a hand down his face miserably and looked up to see all of his dogs perched on the edge of the bed. He took several deep breaths and looked at the ground. He debated on finding a window and jumping out of it to avoid the mortification of facing Hannibal, after the man had seen him in such a state of undress.

Winston huffed right as Diana, Will’s Labrador, sneezed. Will rolled his eyes fondly with a small smile, “C’mon guys.”

Will had to carry Winston, which hadn’t been as difficult as he thought it’d be. Winston wasn’t very heavy, and for once the other dogs didn’t weave around Will’s legs while he walked, so he didn’t have to worry about stepping on any of them. Buster hobbled down the stairs, and was the last one on the landing, but none of the other pups strayed far from Will.

Will bent over to set Winston down, but thought better of it and shouldered the kitchen door open, sticking a leg out to keep the dogs from running in, knowing that although Hannibal allowed the dogs to stay in the house, the man would not appreciate them running amuck in the kitchen.

Will balanced himself on the doorframe and tried not to focus on the fact that he was still in his boxers. “Where should we...?” He trailed off and looked around for where Hannibal would’ve put the food for the dogs.

Hannibal wiped his hands on a towel before slinging it on his shoulder. He stepped around the kitchen island, giving Will a full view of his lower half. Hannibal wore flannel pyjamas. It was surprising that he wasn’t wearing slacks, or that he wasn’t wearing a pyjama set.

Hannibal stretched an arm out and guided Will to the dining room. Which was an *actual* dining room, and not attached to the kitchen like Will had seen on television.

Will chose the spot to the left of the head chair and set Winston down gently on the floor next to his chair.

Hannibal left and returned with two dishes and set them on the table before going back for the rest.

“Do you need help?” Will called. He felt horribly useless just sitting around while Hannibal worked. He had his hands pressed into the chair between his legs as if he were twelve.

“Not at all, Baby.” Hannibal’s voice dipped what he said “Baby,” and it made an unfamiliar heat flow through Will’s lower stomach that made Will press his legs together as he tried not to squirm.

Will huffed loudly so Hannibal would hear him. He could handle the girls calling him baby, but from Hannibal it was different. The girls called him baby like a little brother. Hannibal called him Baby like...Will supressed a shiver and decided not to follow that train of thought.

Hannibal made several trips of bringing two plates full of food into the dining room and setting them on the table. When there were enough plates for each dog, Hannibal set each down near the wall to the left of the table, save for Winston’s, whose was set in front of him.

Hannibal set Will’s plate in front of him before sitting down and Will shifted his foot as he tried not to stare at Hannibal. Will tried to think of something to talk about, but realised he had nothing of value to say. Will occupied himself by looking at his plate. An omelette that looked like a commercial for a Bed & Breakfast with two slices of toast laid neatly next to it, along with three perfectly cooked strips of bacon on the side.

Will waited for Hannibal to begin before he dug in.

“Oh my *god*! Why do you work at the club when you can cook like this!?” Will nearly yelled, after forking off a bite. Will felt himself turn red at his outburst, and tried not to hunch his shoulders when Hannibal flashed him an amused smirk. Will ducked his head quickly, “Sorry, I mean...it’s really good.”

Hannibal’s amusement didn’t fade, “Thank you, Baby.”

Will cleared his throat and lifted his head, but kept his eyes on the table, “My name’s Will. If you wanted to know. You told me yours, I thought it’d be even if I told you my name, but calling me Baby doesn’t really bother me, it’s just a little weird and I figured I’d—” Will sucked in a breath and ducked his head again, “shut up.” He finished with a mutter when he realised he was rambling.

“Oh? Baby seemed to really suit you.”

Will could hear the teasing in the man’s voice and gave a wry smile.

Will finished before Hannibal did. Will didn’t clear his plate, but he was pleasantly full. Will moved around his bacon with his fork for something to focus on. He tried to content himself

with the silence, but found it excruciating to sit in silence, unsure of what he was meant to do. He blurted the first thing that came to mind, “Your house is *huge*.”

Hannibal hummed and continued eating, “My job pays well.” He looked up at Will as he chewed and Will noticed his eyes were crinkled in amusement.

Will looked around the dining room to avoid the man’s stare, “I’ve heard the boss is really generous.”

Hannibal paused from cutting off another piece of omelette and glanced up at Will with an air of curiosity, “Oh?”

Will nodded and shifted until his was sitting on one of his legs, “I’ve never met him, but he seems ridiculously nice. He doesn’t take a percentage of tips; he actually *helps* his workers.”

Hannibal finished eating and leaned back against his chair with a slight frown, “That’s not a very high bar.”

Will shrugged, “What more would you need? Like I said, I’ve never met him so I can’t say much about him personally.”

Hannibal’s eyes crinkled in amusement and Will looked around the room again to avoid staring at Hannibal’s face for too long. Will looked at his dogs and sighed, his mood dropping significantly.

“What is it?” Hannibal asked, setting down his silverware and wiping the corners of his mouth with a cloth napkin. Because *of course* he had cloth napkins. Will’s own one was resting on his lap like he’d learn to do as a kid.

Will tried to calm himself down, but it was hard to do when he was staring at the product of his own selfishness and stupidity. He’d chosen not to by new locks so he could save up for a nicer apartment, but would he have even needed a new apartment if his had working locks? Sure, it was small, but Will didn’t take up a lot of room. Will bit his lip when he felt it start to wobble and he tried not to start gasping when he felt his throat closing up.

“Baby?” Hannibal set his napkin on the table. “Will, what’s wrong?”

Will wiped his eyes with the palm of his hands, “What am I supposed to do!? Payday isn’t until tomorrow, I have *work* tonight, I’m assuming you do too, I can’t just *leave my dogs here*, I don’t even really know where we *are*, my apartment door is *still* broken, my laptop and textbooks are *gone* and I have an essay due today—”

Will cut himself off to breathe and Hannibal tilted his chin up and rested it on the back of his hand after folding them together, “Would you let me help you out?”

Will looked up hopefully, “You’ll keep my dogs here until I get my door fixed?”

Hannibal’s lips twitched downwards and Will felt like an idiot. His stomach dropped and he blinked to get rid of the blurriness in his vision. He placed his hands on the table to push himself up to leave. “I’m joking, you—we can leave, I can—it’s fine.”

It wasn't fine, he had nowhere to go, he may as well be homeless.

Hannibal put his hand over Will's and Will froze. Hannibal looked up at him with a small smile, though Will knew the man wasn't happy. "You misunderstand. I'm certainly not going to let you live in an apartment with no door."

Will faltered in getting up and looked around the dining room, "So…we can stay here?"

Hannibal let out a sigh and blinked his eyes slowly to keep himself calm, "Yes, Will. You and your dogs are welcome here for as long as you'd like."

Will stared with his mouth open. Hannibal would seriously let a random co-worker stay in his mansion? It was probably inherited, so his ancestral home? Actually, the man probably bought with old money. Hannibal had an accent that was definitely not English so it was more likely that he'd bought this after moving to Maryland. "But—you don't even know me; I could steal from you! What if I already did!?"

Hannibal shrugged, looking far too unconcerned for someone who had antique paintings for home décor. "I wouldn't mind. I assume you'd use the money for veterinarian visits."

Will flushed and looked down at the table, noticing that Hannibal hadn't removed his hand from Will's. Will felt his cheeks get hot and his fingers twitched, but Hannibal remained unwavering in his stance and his stare on Will.

On the one hand, Will really didn't want to go back to his apartment. It would be cold, the door was broken, and there wasn't a whole lot for him to go back to, what with his college supplies stolen and his dogs with him at Hannibal's.

On the other hand, Hannibal was essentially a rich stranger from old money. That rarely meant anything good, despite Will receiving no warning bells, other than a slight ring from the animal skulls.

Will pursed his lips, having made a decision. "I have a problem."

"Tell me, and I'll take care of it." Hannibal had leaned forward and tilted his head up to better see Will's face, and yet Will didn't feel like Hannibal was looking up to him. Will took a brief glance at Hannibal's eyes—oh, wow, they're pretty—and got the distinct feeling that he was being watched by a predator.

Will hastily looked back down and let the moment pass. Will swallowed thickly because he could tell that Hannibal wasn't joking or saying it lightly. Despite the two only knowing each other for months, Hannibal was ready and willing to help Will with whatever the college student needed.

"Um...I was supposed to do laundry last night, but...obviously I didn't so...I don't have clothes for tonight."

Hannibal let Will wear his clothes, and Will couldn't deny how much he loved it. Hannibal lent him a dark blue sweater that was in fact cashmere. The sweater was long on Will, and the college student had to keep shoving the sleeves up his arms to free his hands to mix drinks. It was also overall looser in a way that didn't make Will *look* smaller, but made him feel smaller, and not in a bad way.

It was a deep, secret enjoyment Will had to feel small and precious. Wearing Hannibal's top made Will feel like he was something meant to be protected. That was part of the reason he liked to be called Baby. Rather than making him feel inferior or degraded, it made him feel special in that everyone saw *him* as precious.

Hannibal's pants did not fit *at all*. Not in the waist or the length. Even with a belt on, the waist line bunched uncomfortably and unattractively, and the cuffs of the pants dragged on the floor. Will didn't want to ruin the man's pants, despite how much Hannibal may protest that they weren't worth much or that it wasn't a big deal.

Because of this, Will opted to wear his own pants from yesterday—two days ago? It was hard to believe that Will actually slept through Sunday, his only day off. Regardless, Will was thankful he'd had the foresight to not sleep in them, as he had done before, so they weren't as wrinkled as they could've been.

Hannibal drove them to work and shortly after arriving, the man disappeared down the back hallway and into one of the rooms. Will felt a pang of guilt at having the man drive him earlier than Hannibal's typical schedule. Not that Will knew what time Hannibal usually got to work.

Now that Will knew what car was Hannibal's, Will was certain he'd never seen the car in the parking lot when he arrived at the club. It was unlikely that a custodian had to arrive when the club opened. Hannibal would probably have to kill time until any of his duties were needed.

Will had a thought of inviting the man to stay with him while Will set up for the night, but it was immediately dismissed. Will was already going to be staying with the man for the foreseeable future; he didn't need to spend his working hours with Will too.

Will stared down the dim hallway a bit longing before going about setting up for the night. He wiped the bar down and swept behind the bar while the girls started prepping the stage. He'd cleaned his area on Saturday, so it wasn't necessary, but it did give him something to do.

Surprisingly enough, Chiyoh came by before the club opened and sat in front of the bar. As far as Will could tell, Chiyoh was her real name and Chi was her stage name. Chiyoh was also one of the few girls Will didn't regularly talk with, and she was the only girl who'd never spoken to him.

To be fair, she didn't often speak with anyone. It was known that English wasn't her first language and she preferred to keep to herself. She wasn't seen as rude, or arrogant, or a bitch. She was just the girl that preferred to do things alone, and the girls respected that.

Will could understand her desire for solitude, and he was pleasantly surprised to find out everyone at the club respected Chiyoh's attitude and space. Chiyoh didn't do one on ones, she did her performances on stage and nothing more. In fact, the *only* time Will had seen her speak was to Beverly.

So, her approaching him out of the blue was surprising.

"Hi," Will offered hesitantly. He wasn't sure if he should talk to her, or let her sit in silence. When Alana had told Will about her, she'd just told him not to expect familiarity with or from Chi.

She glared at him for what felt like hours. Her eyes were focused solely on Will and her stage makeup made her eyes seem much darker and vicious than normal. She wasn't frowning, but her resting face was more than a little intimidating and Will had a mental panic about what he could've done to offend her. Before he could say more, she tilted her chin up and spoke. "I like you."

She didn't have much of an accent. No where near what Hannibal's was at least. And her voice was deeper than Will had expected. Then, what she said sunk in.

Will flushed and tried not to look as freaked out as he felt. He waved his hands out in front of him frantically as he tried to dissuade her, "Oh—no, you don't want to like me, I'm useless and really annoying and—I'm not good with commitment, a- and I have seven dogs—I'm *really* bad at communication. Oh my god, you can do so much better."

Will couldn't bare to look at her and was panicking on if she would cry or break his legs, but was shocked to hear her snort. He raised his head to peak at her through the curls of his bangs and saw her smiling softly, "Not like that."

Will's shoulders slumped with relief and he dropped his hands to rest his elbows on the bar counter, "Oh, thank god. You're…very intimidating."

She raised an eyebrow, but Will could feel she wasn't insulted. In fact, he would say she was pleased.

She didn't say much more, after that. She told him to have a good night while Will was cleaning glasses and when he finished and looked up, she was gone. Will had to do a doubletake, but sure enough, she'd snuck away. Will shrugged it off and shortly after, Beverly opened the doors for patrons.

With it being Friday, the place was crowded within thirty minutes and Will was in a flurry to mix drinks. He only slightly regretted not asking Hannibal for a smaller size when he had to roll his sleeves up every five minutes. It became annoying during rush when five people were asking for specialty drinks, but other than that Will was fine with the slight hindrance.

At the end of the night, or the beginnings of morning, Alana and Beverly stopped by his bar as he was throwing away dirty coasters and napkins. They were still in their makeup, though it was a lot darker and blended together than at the beginning, and their outfits.

(Will wasn't sure what to call what they wore. Was it lingerie? Underwear? Stripper uniform? He was too embarrassed to ask.)

"Hey, Baby." Alana greeted, plopping on a stool and resting an arm on the bar. Her face and shoulders were covering with blue glitter and Will mentally cringed when he saw some of it fall onto his freshly cleaned counter.

"Hey, 'Lana, how's Margot?"

Margot had a slight issue with this time of year. Will didn't know much about it, other than Margot becoming extremely paranoid and frantic. She was a little hostile towards Will the last time he saw her; she snapped at him when he asked what her and Alana were doing for the weekend.

Alana later apologized and explained that Margot had some past problems during this time of year, and she'd be off work for a while. Will waved off her apology; he understood that life happened and no one could be happy and friendly all the time.

Alana pursed her lip with slight shrug off her shoulders, "As good as to be expected. She still won't go outside, but she's getting less stressed as the days go on."

Beverly hummed in contribution to the conversation and asked Will for a water. He gave both of them sealed bottles that he kept specifically for the dancers and they smiled appreciatively.

"So, have you guys seen boss today?" Beverly asked casually, though Will could feel her excitement.

Alana slapped her hand on the table and made a noise as she swallowed her water, "I *know* right! He seemed so annoyed!

Beverly reared her head back with her eyebrows raised. "Annoyed? He's so happy today!"

Alana capped her bottle and furrowed her brows, "Are you being serious? He's been glaring at nothing all night!"

Beverly shook her head and pointed a finger at nothing, "I heard him *humming*, Alana. *Humming*."

Alana pursed her lips in a pout. "So maybe he was both. What do you think, Baby?"

Will gave a slight smirk and rolled his eyes, "I *still* haven't met him."

Beverly stood up with an exaggerated frown, "Unacceptable. You're meeting him now."

Alana stood up looking equally as serious and nodded once, "Absolutely, you're great at reading people. You can tell us if he's angry or happy."

Will felt nerves creep into him. He wasn't even in his own clothes, how was he meant to meet their boss *now?* "Oh, I don't know, if we haven't met then he's probably too busy—"

“Nonsense, he’ll love you.” Alana said with certainty. Will had his doubts.

The girls had to drag him out from behind the bar and toward the Boss’s office. Will wasn’t sure if he could actually stop them if he tried, but he still offered little resistance and mainly put on a show of tugging his arms back and turning towards the bar.

The girls told him to wait in the hall while they went to the Boss’s office. The fact that the two of them went together showed that they knew he wasn’t going to run away. Will couldn’t deny that he was a little excited to meet the Boss.

After a minute or two, Will blew out a sigh and leaned against the wall. He fiddled with the sleeves of Hannibal’s sweater for something to focus on. He was so lost in tracing over the knit pattern that he didn’t hear the man himself approach.

“Hello, Baby. What brings you to the back?” Hannibal’s voice made Will start and nearly tug on the sleeve in his hand. Will looked up with wide eyes, but smiled brightly when he saw Hannibal.

“Hannibal! What you doing here?”

Hannibal quirked his lips into a smile, “Well, I was going to take care of the garbage but my bar tender was absent. I went looking for him.”

Will held back a laugh by covering his mouth and hid the warmth in his cheeks he felt at Hannibal calling Will “his” bartender. Will took a second to recover, “The girls wanted me to meet the Boss. They told me to wait out here while they check his office.”

Hannibal hummed in acknowledgement, though before he could properly respond, the two heard the girls’ coming back down the hallway through their loud chatter.

“—no idea!”

“He’s been really weird lately, and I can’t figure out why!”

Hannibal kept his attention on Will and gave a gentle smile. Will flashed a grin back before turning towards the girls. Alana looked up and saw him and Hannibal standing next to each other and halted. She grabbed Beverly’s arm and tugged at it while jerking her head in their direction.

Will rolled his eyes and crossed his arms petulantly, “Y’all took so long, I almost left with Hannibal!”

Hannibal snorted from beside him and Will fought a grin. He looked back at the girls with a small frown when he noticed it as just the two of them, “Still no Boss?”

It seemed weird that the Boss was never around. Or, Will couldn’t say that Boss was never around, just that Will had never seen the man himself. Either way, it seemed odd.

They didn’t answer and Hannibal put a hand on Will’s shoulder. “Perhaps another night. Now, I already took care of the trash, are you ready to go, Baby?”

Will nodded and directed a small wave at the two girls, “Yup. I’ll see y’all later!”

The ride to Hannibal’s ~~house~~ mansion was quiet but pleasant. They didn’t talk, but for once Will didn’t feel like the silence was oppressing or overbearing. It was comfortable and calm, Will enjoyed the view out of his window as the city bled into the countryside, and Hannibal focused on the road.

Arriving at the mansion also held little words. Hannibal went upstairs and got ready for bed after showing Will where some pre-made dog food was. (Although it wasn’t actually dog food. It was gourmet and nicer than Will had eaten himself in a while.)

Will puttered around the kitchen until the dogs were mostly done. Hannibal came down and helped Will take the dogs outside for a bathroom break before the two of them herded Will’s pack inside and up the stairs, this time with Hannibal carrying Winston.

When Will shut his door after bidding the man a good night, he shucked his shoes and jeans off, and fell asleep in the man’s sweater.

Chapter End Notes

okay so, will ditched class for the day. he had no prior absences and hannibal convinced him to stay home with minimal effort. will spent the day exploring the house, i just couldn’t find a way to incorporate it so that’s what happened

feel free to comment any spelling/grammatical errors because auto correct is a BITCH

thanks for reading :)

End Notes

my tumblr is: the-Link-dock

if you have a fic idea or a scene you wanna see, you can request there!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!